**President’s Report for Cooleman Ridge Park Care Group, 2023-2024**

After a few years of unseasonal summer rain, the Ridge up until recently, has been well-covered by grasses and trees. Unfortunately, the dry winter of 2024 is beginning to show in the decrease of grass-height. Fortunately, the trees have recovered and are looking magnificent.

Our main concern over the past year has been the proliferation of St Johns Wort, which now covers a majority of the Ridge. We have been able to work on small areas with hand-removal, and some spraying has been done in a few areas, but these have made little impact on this weed. Most of Canberra’s reserves have been similarly affected. We hope that climate change will negatively impact this weed in the near future.

The Group has continued its monthly weeding sessions, with varying number of participants from 4 to 15. We’ve welcomed a number of new members, and we’re glad of their additional weeding skills. We’ve weeded in a couple of new areas – Goat Gully on the western side of Mt Arawang, and we have re-visited Reet’s Patch above Kathner St. Other weeding areas have been the One Tree Hill, the Old Dam, Anniversary Seat, mid-ridge and Lincoln Saddle, We seem to be making some inroads into the verbascum problem on One Tree Hill, although that may be just a temporary respite!

We missed out on a grant for signage, and although we could re-apply next year, it may not be worth it because it seems that signs are not being encouraged. We did benefit from a grant that paid for contractors to remove and poison exotic trees/bushes on the edges of the “forest” and the area north of the forest on the “Western Ledge”. This grant was provided with the understanding that CRPCG would regularly check the area and deal with any re-growth. Unfortunately, there is still some exotic bushes in the middle of the forest which are hard to reach due to the thick bursaria undergrowth. Their seeds will encourage new growth.

There were 2 control-burns executed on the northern slopes during summer - one in mid-December around Cooleman Trig, and another one to the west of Cooleman Trig in March. The first one unfortunately damaged some of the Allocasuarina verticillata and a large patch of Chryocephalum and they have not shown any signs of recovering. The second burn was carefully controlled around “Reet’s Patch” so the orchids will bloom again this spring, however the nearby large patch of xerochysum is struggling to recover.

Paul has been doing some great mapping of the Ridge – where we weed, where the control-burn fires have been, points of interest etc. A lot of important information which should be up-loaded onto the website so that it is not lost. We have also been given a large cache of maps from a previous member. These include large laminated maps from 1994 with tree and vegetation information, and aerial photographs from 1944, 1968, 1985, 1991, 1995 and 1997. We plan to scan them and keep multiple digital records of the maps.

Our Waterwatch team (Helen Govey, Peter Lindenmeyer, Robyn Gow) have assiduously monitored our 2 dams on a monthly basis throughout the whole year. The health of both dams continues to be pretty good. The azolla which has covered the Old Dam for about 18 months has finally disappeared. Robyn and Peter participated in a bug survey of Kathner Dam and Martin is writing a summary of this shortly.

We have planned to encourage /plant some vegetation in the Kathner St dam, however this dam is quite deep so it is difficult to find suitable species. We had planned to place a habitat log (or some logs) into the dam to create a shallower area. Our ranger, Ben Harvey, was organising this but unfortunately he moved on to greener pastures in June so little has been done since.

SACTCG has offered to create a new brochure for Cooleman Ridge. Linda is currently communicating with Joe to get this under way.

We continue our membership of the Conservation Council ACT (CCACT).

Helen Govey is our representative on the Biodiversity Working Group (BWG). Our membership is based on the CRPCG's determination to care for and maintain our environment. This includes advocating for non-urbanisation of the Western Edge of Canberra - a key issue for the CCACT. CCACT is also proactive in lobbying the government for improved funding for Landcare/Parks and Conservation to encourage better management of our nature reserves. This includes better weed and feral animal control.

Thanks to everyone who has contributed to CRPCG during 2023-2024, and especially thanks to the Committee:

Chris Oates - Vice-president, grant applications,

Rob Lundie - Secretary and newsletter and tree-name-tagger

Jenny Shapcott - Website

Helen Govey - Waterwatch and CRPCG representative on Conservation Council

Paul Sheils - Mapping

Natasha Newman - Public officer

Rohan Thomas - Treasurer

Peter Lindenmayer - Waterwatch

We look forward to lots of weeding challenges in the 2024-2025 year!!

Linda Spinaze

President.

Cooleman Ridge Park Care Group.

7 October 2024